

ARMENIAN TOURISM INDUSTRY DECLINED BY 1%



The tourism industry in Armenia decreased by one percent in 2015, according to Karen Chshmarityan, the country's economy minister. As many as 1,192,120 foreign tourists visited the country last year. Monasteries like Geghard and Khor Virap as well as the Caucasus Mountains are the most popular attractions of the country.

The minister attributed the decline to the reduction in the number of visitors from Georgia and the Russian Federation by 11 percent and 6 percent, respectively. In total, the authorities recorded a drop of 60,000 international tourists. **Russia represents 45 percent and Georgia 27 percent of all the foreign visits to the country.**

Regional economic problems have also contributed to the decline in Armenian tourism industry, according to Chshmarityan. On the other hand, the increase in the number of visitors from Iran reached 25 percent, for the UAE it was 38 percent, for Canada 16 percent, and the amount of U.S. grew by 42 percent.

In the meantime, Armenia and Montenegro are planning to cooperate with respect to tourism. In fact, the approval of an agreement between the countries is on the Armenian Cabinet's meeting agenda.

As per the terms of the draft agreement, both governments will support travel agencies, simplify visa procedures for foreign visitors and promote festivals, fairs, seminars, conferences, international tourist exhibitions and other events. In addition, the countries will not only retrain their specialists, but also exchange journalists and other experts. **Montenegro has extended visa-free regime for Armenian citizens during the summer season for many years.**

Moreover, the Armenian Development Fund (ADF) has signed a cooperation agreement with UNDP for promoting rural tourism the country and enhancing the role of Armenian tourism industry in the socio-economic development of the local communities, according to a press release issued by the office of the United Nations in Armenia.

UN's Resident Coordinator as well as UNDP's Resident Representative in Armenia, Bradley Busetto, said the aim of the cooperation is to ensure that the joint steps become productive.

Arman Khachatryan, executive director, ADF, said that a tourism development program is currently being implemented in Bjni in Kotayk province as part of ADF-UNDP cooperation and successful implementation of this project will set the example for similar initiatives.

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